



## Department of Veterans Affairs

Harry S. Truman Memorial  
Veterans Affairs Hospital  
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# NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### LOCAL VETERANS DAY ESSAY CONTEST WINNERS ANNOUNCED

COLUMBIA, Mo. —. Eight Columbia Public School District students are winners of the annual Veterans Day essay contest sponsored by Truman Memorial Veterans' Hospital.

Open to junior and senior high students in the Columbia district, entries were reviewed by a language arts teacher at each student's school prior to submission. VA staff members judged and determined winning essays in the junior and senior high divisions. Cash prizes from donated funds are awarded to the winners. The winning authors will be recognized at the Veterans Day ceremony at Truman VA on Wednesday, Nov. 11.

Junior high division winners are **Billy Swift**, West Junior High School (first place); **Rayna Sims**, West Junior High School (second place); **Kyle Ooi**, West Junior High School (third place) and **Annie Rumpf**, Jefferson Junior High School (honorable mention). Senior high division winners include **Mary Beth Hawley**, Hickman High School (first place); **Emilie Lewis**, Rock Bridge High School (second place); **Rachel Rice**, Rock Bridge High School (third place) and **Allison Trabue**, Rock Bridge High School (honorable mention).

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## **Veterans: The Heroes of America**

By: Billy Swift

Who do you most admire or look up to? Most people would name some sports star, but the true heroes of our nation are our veterans. Veterans are what make the United States of America so great. They are special because they are willing to leave their lives behind and to die for our country. They sacrifice so that fellow citizens may be safe from attack. They fight to protect our freedoms, which so many take for granted.

When our war veterans decided to join the armed forces, they understood the risks they were taking. They might not see their children grow up. They would miss precious years at home, missing birthdays, a child's first step, a t-ball game, a graduation or a family reunion. They sacrificed their own desires, because they wanted to protect not only their family's rights, but their fellow citizens' rights too. Thomas Campbell summed it up best, saying: "The patriot's blood is the seed of Freedom's tree." Our veterans gave their blood, because they treasured freedom.

America's war veterans understood that even if they came home alive, they may be badly injured. In the Iraq War alone over 31,000 veterans suffered injuries. Michel de Montaigne, a famous French writer once said, "Valor is stability, not of legs and arms, but of courage and the soul." Many war veterans have given their legs and their arms to battle. They came home scarred. But, they never lost their souls, their courage or their hearts.

Our veterans understand the costs of war. No matter our technological advances, our veterans faced difficult times. They fought wars in deserts, mountains, and caves.

Veterans: The Heroes of America  
Billy Swift

They faced enemies ready to kill them. They saw the horrors of war, a fallen soldier from their unit, a bleeding civilian accidentally caught in the cross fire, a village bombed to the ground. Veterans saw schools lost, homes destroyed and lives changed forever. Veterans long for peace, a day without violence and destruction.

Sacrifice and courage make our war veterans so special. They have given their lives for our country. They suffered the horrors of war. Our war veterans are the heart and soul of America. They protect our freedoms. They are the true heroes of the United States of America.

## Why Are Veterans Special?

By Rayna Sims

November 11<sup>th</sup> is a special day. It is a day where we Americans are supposed to stop and think about the men and women who have served our country. I hadn't thought much about Veteran's Day, let alone why veterans were special. But after writing this essay I understand how special these former soldiers are. Veterans are special because they are a living part of history, they help keep our country safe, and they remind us of how privileged we are to be living in a free America.

My grandpa is a WWII veteran. He was a Marine and was stationed in Japan for part of the war. He tells me stories about the places he saw that had been destroyed by the atomic bomb. It's much more interesting to learn about history from a person who was actually there, than from reading it in a textbook. Veterans are special because they are history. They have been where nobody else has been and have seen things that no photographer has snapped a picture of. Authors, museum curators, movie directors and anyone who wants a first hand look into wartime experiences will interview a veteran. As veterans die off, so do pieces of history.

Our country does many things to keep its people safe. But sometimes, the people have to keep the country safe. Brave individuals put their own safety on the line to protect others. They risk their lives for millions of people they don't even know. They are not stopped by fear of losing a limb to an explosion or even their life to a bullet. No matter how you feel about war, there is no doubt that soldiers and veterans have done one of the highest duties an American can do.

I once saw a bumper sticker that said, "If you can read this, thank a teacher. Thank a soldier that it's in English." Soldiers have and still are keeping our country free. Freedom is something that comes with a price but often is something we take for granted. Not everybody has freedom and those who do should be grateful to the veterans that allowed us this privilege.

This year on November 11<sup>th</sup>, I will be extra careful to pay my respects and thanks to the brave veteran men and women. Whether it is for historical purposes, or as a reminder of how privileged we are to have freedom, each and every veteran is special. Because of veterans, we have freedom and a country of which to be proud. We know that no matter what happens, or who tries to take us down, we will join together and become invincible. For all these reasons, I am proud to be an American. Proud to be part of such a great free nation. Proud to know there are people who care enough to put others first. Thank you, veterans, for helping to make this country the amazing place it is today.

Kyle Ooi

### **A Veteran's Honor**

"Veteran" is one of the most honorable titles in America. The valiant individuals who have earned the right to that title are, without question, singularly special among the citizens of our country. These are the men who were willing put their lives between the cruel guns of our nation's enemies, and our own lives. These are the men who sacrificed the warm comfort of a home for the harsh, unforgiving battlefield. These are the men who traded the joy of familial bonds for the tragedy of comrades in arms who only last long enough to make their deaths painful. These are men who have gone into the depths of the closest thing to hell on this earth, and come back. No man who goes to war comes back in one piece, though.

The sacrifices veterans have made cling to them like parasites. They will cling to them for the rest of their lives. Even if they are whole in body, they can never be whole in mind again. The stress of living for so long with the fact that they are out there to die with a bang, in order to protect other people who get to live with a bang, leaves an irremovable scar in the minds of mere men. The horrifying images of the battlefield have too strongly engraved themselves into a veteran's mind for them to ever forget. People say, "Home is where the heart is," and no one understands that better than a veteran. Can you even imagine the toll it would take on a man to constantly have to deal with the heart-wrenching fact that the home he left behind, the family he left behind, he may never get to return to? In addition, a veteran had to go through that longing while being virtually unable to bond with anyone else, lest his heart break more, since all his comrades could die at any time. However, even after all this, veterans are the ones who get to

Kyle Ooi

## A Veteran's Honor

come back to society, to life, and try their best to fit back into the world that expects life, when for years they were trained to expect death.

“Veterans” are the men who went through this. They are the ones that, as individuals, sacrificed so much, and were willing to sacrifice everything if necessary, for a nation, for its people, and for the generations that would inherit the nation. Furthermore, veterans are the men who live on, and must therefore continue to endure their sacrifices for us. For these things they’ve surrendered, we owe veterans a massive debt, and we can start with giving them our respect. A veteran’s deeds and sacrifices are what make him exceptionally special, and to those does the title of “veteran” owe its honor.

## Why Veterans are Special

Imagine leaving everything you knew. Everything you were comfortable with, and everything you loved. Being thrust into a situation where strangers from all over the country must suddenly turn into your best friends, the ones you trust with your life. Imagine killing enemy soldiers much like yourself, and watching your buddies die horrible deaths. Defeating an empire, and then coming home and trying to live life like it once was. If you can even imagine what that is like, that is why veterans are special.

The Veteran I knew best was my Great Uncle Ralph. He left college and the life he had in Missouri to liberate Europe and ended up right in the middle of the Battle of the Bulge. His convoy was traveling toward the front lines when they were stopped at a crossroad by Germans in American uniforms. It was snowing there in Belgium, and my uncle and his buddies were huddling together to stay warm under the canvas of an army transport truck.

Suddenly, hundreds of machine gun bullets ripped through the canvas, instantaneously killing everyone but my uncle. He was



Why veterans are special  
**Annie Rumpf**

trapped with all of his dead buddies on top of him, covered with the blood and brains of his dead friends. My Uncle Ralph lay there, listening for a clue for where to run. He grabbed an extra clip from a dead friend, and emptied his gun at where he thought the nearest enemy machine gun was, and ran for his life into the frozen forest.

My Uncle Ralph ran and ran until he came upon the remains of a barn with a pile of manure outside. He was freezing to death, and needing a warm place to hide. The only option he had was to crawl into the manure pile and wait out the night; so that's what he did.

When my Uncle Ralph awoke, he didn't have any food, water, ammunition or warm clothes. Ralph was forced to resort to sneaking up on German soldiers and killing them for their food, weapons, and clothing. All the while, he listened for the sounds of battle until he found the American Army.

I know my Uncle Ralph isn't the only one who had to live through horrors like this. The only person my Uncle ever told this story to was my father. He never told anyone else. Even though my Uncle Ralph was a kind, gentle, peaceful man after the war, I think he felt guilty. Guilty because he lived when everyone else around him

*Why Veterans are special*  
**Annie Rumpf**

died, and guilty because he had to kill other men so he would not be killed. Veterans who have lived through things like that carry it with them all their lives.

I want to thank the Veterans that nobody knows about. The ones that haven't told people their story for whatever reason. They are every bit as heroic as the ones who feel like they can talk about it, and they are every bit as important to America's freedom, and the freedom of the people in the countries we have liberated. I am grateful for the Veterans that can talk about it too; we need to know the cost of our freedom.

## The Specialness of all Veterans

By: Mary Beth Hawley

I asked Jim Starbuck, my great uncle, who is a veteran of the Vietnam War, why he thought veterans were so special. I was expecting an answer that talked about how they fought for their country. Also how they kept the people in this country safe from harm, thus are so special because of the great sacrifice they gave to the people of this country. The answer I got instead was quite different. I was told that veterans are not special. They see themselves as equal to everyone else. Uncle Jim told me they did their duty, nothing more and nothing less. The fact that veterans do not see themselves as special is the very quality in them that makes them so very special.

When I was talking to him, he told me that serving for this country was his military duty. That evil exists in the world and the veterans and people currently in the military are the only thing that is keeping that evil out of our fair country. He knew that to keep his loved ones safe he would have to fight, but in no way does that make him any more special than a doctor or a school teacher. As I was listening to him tell me this, all I could think about was how serious he was. I was amazed that he truly did not see himself as being a heroic person for what he had done during his years of service in the military.

This quality is what makes my uncle and all veterans so special. They gave so much so that we could all be free, and in the process do not see themselves as being any better than those who did not serve their country. He did what he had to do to keep America safe, and in my eyes he is the most amazing person I know. All veterans did something they did not truly wish to do for the betterment of society and yet feel it was their duty and wish only to be treated as a man who has done his duty and nothing more.

So in truth veterans are special because of the humbleness they have in terms of their military service. They may see themselves as just normal everyday Americans, but in my eyes they are the greatest Americans we have. Evil exists in our world today just as did in the 1960's. Our veterans were the ones keeping it out then, just as our military men and women are fighting the same fight today.

## 2ND PLACE - HIGH SCHOOL

Why Are Veterans Special?

Emilie Lewis

Veterans are special because they have seen what no others have seen. They have experienced what most only view through The Things They Carried, or *Saving Private Ryan*. They know the truth of the war, what actually happened and not the fantasized view. The public can be told about the war, can be given the death toll and the 'who' and 'why' behind the fighting, but only the veterans know the firsthand account. Only they can tell you what really happened.

Veterans are by far the most effected by a war. They were the soldiers who offered up their lives in the pursuit of America's freedom. They've seen torture and bombings, seen their friends gunned down beside them, yet they still found the strength to carry on, to continue the fight they pledged to partake in.

Most Americans have an obscured view of the many wars in our country's history. They imagine it is a lot of joking around, a lot of breaks in between the intense action where heroes are made and legends begin. But, even after reading first-hand accounts of the subject, those who didn't fight don't really know the horrors that soldiers saw. They can't even begin to fathom the loss of a fallen comrade. Only those who know fear, who have almost literally looked death in the eye, can possibly begin to understand the incredible act of war.

"Don't shoot until you can see the whites of their eyes." This phrase seems most commonly associated with war. Though the picture is clear to all who read, though they understand, they cannot connect. They cannot completely value those simple words. It is only those that have struggled, have fought and lost more than any other, that know the true consequence of war.

## Why Are Veterans Special?

### The Collage

What makes a veteran? Is it honor, glory, or courage? Is it an average civilian being transformed into an almost Herculean figure? Or is it a valiant soldier, willing to give up his life? As a matter of fact, it is all of these and many more things combined to create what should be the eighth wonder of the world. Anyone who is ready to sacrifice their life at any given moment for their country and the generations to come should be celebrated not only on a specific day of the year, but every moment possible. What separates a veteran from any person you see walking down the street? Everything about them. From the memories they carry, the bravery they shared, and the time they gave up, the collage of a veteran is something that can never be replicated.

The ability to remain sane after all the terror that one must be put through in war is in itself an extremely credible accomplishment. Most people are terrified to turn the lights off after watching The Boogey Man, but veterans are subjected to real-life horror as they watch and participate in some of history's saddest events. In order to keep a level head on after being around such tragedy is an absolute miracle and display of incredible amounts of self control and inner strength.

People see all the time the effect that war has on a country and even just an individual. To see that hardship and then sign oneself up for it, all in the name of one's country is one of the most honorable things in this world. While enduring rats, bombs,

and gunshots, a soldier must keep his or her head up high and remember why they came in the first place. The ability to remain strong through all of the physical pain of war displays the immense amount of bravery all veterans possess.

In every day life, many people won't even pause on the street to help another passerby with directions to the nearest gas station, much less dedicate years of their life to protect the person standing next to them. Giving up all of that time, knowing that one could be using it to benefit one's interests or ideals is an amazing act of unselfishness.

If someone were to ask, "Why are veterans special?" there would not be one right or wrong answer. Veterans are special because of the hundreds of different things that set them apart from all other Americans. The valiance, strength, and humility they possess only begin the list. These things and many others are what make veterans so special.

# HONORABLE MENTION - HIGH SCHOOL

Allison Trabue  
"A Lesson From a Veteran"

I've been raised with strong morals that include respecting my flag, my soldiers, my country and my world as a whole and a lot of this can be credited to my grandpa who was stationed in Germany after World War II.

Being raised on a farm in Oklahoma my grandpa didn't care what he did when he turned of age, all he knew was he wanted to be off of that farm. During that time most men his age were either expected to help their families or serve their country. He had always had a strong sense of adventure as a kid so his brother and he decided to pack up and sign up for the army.

Little did he know after training it would be his luck to go to Germany and serve where he would meet his wife of 48 years. After serving his time my grandpa and my grandma headed home, where my grandpa was born and raised, back to Oklahoma and then to Minnesota where they would start a family consisting of three daughters and later those three daughters would produce eight grandkids for my grandparents.

During his involvement in the army I have a feeling my grandpa grew drastically from a young man to a grown man. I have no doubt the army created his strong sense of family and pride which he now teaches his grandchildren.

Whenever I'm at grandpa's it's often a taboo to bring up politics around him. because he starts in on rants about our country and "how the times have changed" but as often as I hear him complain about the way our country is headed I hear ten times more about how much he truly loves his country.



Allison Trabue  
"A Lesson From a Veteran"

I think his rants have taught me an important life lesson, that you will always love and care for something that you're passionate about no matter how much you disagree with the choices that others make regarding your passion.

There isn't a single thing in this world that could make my grandpa sway away from the pride he has for his country and I imagine the same is true for most veterans' which is what makes them so special, their loyalty to their country.